From the comforts of print to the possibilities of digital media: Leading the way in teaching political leadership in a Faculty of Arts

Dale Holt and Siew Mee Barton
Teaching and Learning Support Unit
Deakin University

Greg Barton
School of Social and International Studies
Deakin University

Since it inception, Deakin University has been committed to the delivery of innovative, high quality course materials to its off campus students. Until recently these packages were predominantly print based, although augmented with audio-visual materials delivered in cassette format. Ironically, with the advent of information and communications technologies (ICT), and some select computer assisted learning and multimedia packages, there was an overall decline in the use of audio and video as important means of enhancing learning. Like many other universities, Deakin has moved to a strong, centralised approach to the provision of its digital and online corporate technology environment. With investment in these technologies has come a renewed interest in the ways in which text and audio-visual materials in digital form can enhance students' learning experiences. Moreover, the ways in which a variety of digital media supported by online developments can create new models and approaches to teaching/learning has figured prominently. This paper presents a case study of how this challenge has been taken up in a unit, *Political Leadership*, in the Faculty of Arts. The academic teacher's intentions in moving to a completely digital approach are examined along with students' experiences of learning in the subject. Issues are considered from the experience.

Keywords: digital media, learning management system, resource based learning, internationalising the curriculum

Introduction

> We (still) applaud the ideal of the 'satisfied customer' [read university student]. …Instead, we must focus on creating a scintillating … encompassing … dramatic … novel... 'customer experience' (Peters, 2003, p.113).

So we can say the same for students in higher education – a 'customer experience' of substance, vitality and memorability. Amidst major new investments in corporate technology infrastructures, underpinned by the acquisition of learning management systems, digital object learning management systems, streaming technologies and so on, remains the enduring challenge of finding and realising educational value, or, put another way, the creation of educative experiences, for teachers and learners. Institutions have declared their strategic intentions in the area of online teaching and learning. These intentions are expressed in strategic and operational plans which attempt to draw together online developments with broader commitments to the development of graduate attributes, internationalisation of the curriculum and use of experiential learning. However, what of the responses to these directions by academic teaching staff on the ground? Clearly they need to engage constructively with myriad plans and policies, and new technologies in order to give effect to both institutional and personal styles and pedagogical convictions. Despite this they tend not to be consulted. They are often the unheard but critically important stakeholder group through which new possibilities must be grasped and realised if their institutions are to fully benefit from the potential of online learning.

This paper outlines an innovative development in the move from print to digital media and online work in order to help achieve key curriculum aspirations as shaped by a senior academic in charge of the unit. The unit's subject matter is concerned with Political Leadership and in itself the unit has come to exercise a kind of leadership in its use of digital media and online environment in ways quite different to many of its immediate predecessors in the Faculty of Arts at Deakin University. What makes this particular unit

interesting is the academic's decision to make a complete break with the use of printed study guides and readers, and his emphasis on the use of alternative media. The approach has aroused interest across the University challenging staff to think afresh about their conceptions of the value of different aspects of their teaching generally, and the use of different media and the role and function of 'study guides' in particular. In this paper the Unit Chair's intentions in developing this new type of learning environment are examined along with students' experiences with it in its first year of offering.

Background

The *Political Leadership* unit is offered on-campus at Deakin University's Geelong and Melbourne campuses in the State of Victoria as well as off-campus. The unit is offered at Levels 2, 3 and 4 as part of the Politics and Policy Studies major in the Faculty of Arts, Bachelor of Arts degree. In its first semester of offer, in the first half of 2004, 98 students enrolled in the unit. Political Leadership is a new unit within a redeveloped major in politics and policy studies. It is part of an overall review and redevelopment of all units in the major. The aims of the review and renewal of the major were to further internationalise the curriculum, enhance the development of other desired graduate attributes in line with the University's *Statement of Graduate Attributes Policy* (the 'Deakin Advantage'), and to extend the use of digital and online technologies in line with the University's *Online Technologies in Courses and Units Policy*.

There has been a clear shift in universities in the last five years to move 'online' and large investments in IT infrastructure to support this move have been made across the sector (the motivations of various stakeholders involved in this development were examined by Holt, Rice, Smissen and Bowly (2001)). So far there appears to have been an almost universal commitment to the establishment of such infrastructure through a strong corporate, centralised approach. All agree that this investment is necessary. What is not so clear is how best to use these technologies to enhance the quality and efficiency of teaching and learning. This in turn requires that key aspects of the educational experience are made accessible and affordable to a mass student audience. The need to provide a broad range of educational opportunities at appropriate and maintainable quality and cost to large student cohorts is the imperative in higher education globally. Central to achieving the potential educational benefits of the new corporate technology investments lies the changing but still critically important role of the academic teacher in higher education.

Mindful of the possibility of new disjunctions occurring between technological imperative and pedagogical interests, Holt and Segrave (2003) outlined *six areas of potential value adding* for teachers and learners in developing and using the new corporate technologies: broadened and direct contributions from learning support stakeholders; opening up of learning environments to external parties; customisation and personalisation of learning experiences; sharing of learning resources; development of virtual practica; and ecologically responsive e-learning environments. These areas can be further grounded through an understanding of *six key principles of tertiary teaching effectiveness* most recently articulated by Ramsden (2003, pp.93-99) and covering: interest and explanation; concern and respect for students and student learning; appropriate assessment and feedback; clear goals and intellectual challenge; independence, control and engagement; and learning from students.

The areas of e-learning benefit were raised in the context of the need for critical reflection on the role of academic teachers and other parties in the changing education enterprise of the university in contemporary higher education. More importantly, the areas are seen as ways in which teacher agency can be preserved in era of corporate approaches to e-learning. Deakin University's commitment to significantly expanding its online presence, included a decision to require all undergraduate students enrolled from 2004 to undertake at least one unit in their studies in 'wholly online' mode (i.e. with no face to face teaching irrespective of the mode of enrolment), new models and approaches shaped by academic teaching concerns are desperately needed (see Deakin University Strategic Plan 2004 *Taking Deakin University Forward*, 'Deakin Online' Management Plan 2003-2007). The Political Leadership unit model represents one of many emerging responses to these strategic directions and operational necessities. It particularly attempts to reclaim the benefits of learning through a *range of media* coupled with the establishment of a more *ecologically responsive e-learning environment* involving a *range of learning support stakeholders* and contributions from *parties external to the institution*.

The intentions of the academic teacher

One of the authors (Greg Barton) is the writer developer and Unit Chair of the Political Leadership unit. Many academic teachers are concerned with what to teach, and the rationale for teaching it, when embarking upon a major course or unit review and redevelopment. This concern is often overlooked in the push to get things happening online. The point of most constructive engagement for many is the *key goals* of any curriculum renewal initiative, and not the area of media/technology selection and use per se. The genesis of the new approach in Political Leadership lay, at one level, with the overall curriculum redevelopment of the politics and policy studies major, and, at a more local level, with an academic staff member with interesting ideas about the subject matter of a unit in political leadership. Additionally, the staff member could see how his ideas about the nature of the subject could be well supported through much greater emphasis on the use of digital learning resources.

At the major curriculum redevelopment level, the academic teaching team wished to put in place a new look major which was: consonant with the University's priorities to further internationalise the whole curriculum enabling a substantially wider and more explicit engagement with ideas, debates and developments beyond Australia; further strengthening its vocational orientation; broadening the scope of offerings in regard to the student base given a very high proportion of the students undertake combined degrees such as Arts-Commerce; offering students a better choice and greater flexibility in moving through and achieving a strong, balanced politics major which would compare very well with offerings in leading institutions; balanced across semesters from a student and staff, and faculty viewpoint and effectively resourced; taking advantage of the University's strong directions in online teaching and learning, referred to as Deakin Studies Online (DSO).

The Unit Chair wished to offer a broad ranging curriculum based on, and expressive of, the above set of factors. Based on his research interests in the field of political leadership, he wished to have a broad ranging treatment of different political leaders in different historical periods in different parts of the world with different types of political 'authority' and in different cultural contexts. The curriculum is structured topic by topic (or parallel themes) (Rowntree 1981, p.107) traversing the terrains of: the **triumph of persistence** – unlikely leaders at war; **dissident politics** in the developing world; **power and perception** – the patriarchs of Southeast Asia; **idealism, reality and the transition to democracy**; the **US presidency**; the **Australian Prime Minister**; and the **politics of moral capital**. While topics are addressed in on-campus lectures in a certain sequence, the subject matter itself can be learnt in various orders assuming a knowledge of the key concept of moral capital covered in the opening topic.

The analytical glue binding together the various elements of the unit is the application of a theory of moral capital to the study of political leadership. The uniquely defined curriculum is also characterised by providing students with considerable flexibility and choice in relation to essay assessment work around a broad set of political leaders and political leadership. Such choice and flexibility being seen as one of the key principles of an enabling learning environment in higher education literature (see Ramsden 2003 above). It is significant that the Unit Chair was also IT literate and was pre-disposed to taking unique advantage of support offered as part of Deakin's e-learning strategy. This IT competence translated into a commitment to providing students with opportunities to work with a range of printed, and digital text, audio and video materials along with Internet resources. The unit was therefore designed to make a special contribution in allowing students to use ICT in task related ways to enhance their digital information literacy and ultimately lifelong learning skills.

The audio interview with the author of the textbook was designed to bring external expertise more intimately into the students' learning environment. This was also done by interviewing a number of Deakin staff around their knowledge of and passion for particular political leaders. It was recognised that many of the political leaders featured in the unit may be pretty much unknown to many of the students who had never before heard audio recordings or seen visual recordings of these leaders. The idea behind using television broadcast documentary footage of some of these leaders was to allow students to experience them as people more directly and vividly than could be achieved through scholarly text discourse alone. Current licence arrangements allowing the use of broadcast material recorded live off air has reignited interest and opportunity in using high quality video documentaries, for example, in digital form as key learning resources in educational programs. The Unit Chair figured prominently in these audio and video enhancements. These media provide expressive outlets for the teaching staff member to

infuse his own interests, indeed, academic identity through the unit and to claim a strong sense of professional ownership and commitment. Bates' (1995) observations in relation to educational broadcast television apply equally to recorded video documentaries and, in-house video and audio featuring Deakin staff used in the unit:

> The argument is that television allows the [distance education] student both to identify the individuality of the teacher(s) responsible for the distance teaching material, and to provide a public image and awareness of the university's presence, a sense of belonging and community for the otherwise isolated student. The feedback collected from British Open University students over a number of years indicates clearly that students appreciate seeing the people responsible for the production of the teaching materials on television. (p.69)

Dimensions of the learning environment

As detailed in Table 1, the learning environment consisted of pre-packaged learning resources accessed primarily through a set of three CDs, a communication environment available through Deakin Studies Online (DSO) in turn underpinned by the University's new learning management system (WebCT Vista), and face to face classes for on-campus students at the Geelong and Melbourne campuses (these lectures were audio streamed for all students, including off-campus students). The CD pack contained *20 audio interviews*, *6 video interviews/presentations*, *5 video documentaries* recorded live off air, and *61 e-readings* (approx. 1400 pages). In its multimedia resource based approach, and the role of the learning management system within it, this unit development is similar to that reported by Holt, Rice and Armatas (2002) in establishing an ICT enhanced resource based learning (RBL) environment in first year psychology at Deakin.

Table 1: Dimensions of the learning environment

Prepackaged learning resources	Computer mediated communication	Face to face teaching (for on-campus students)
Printed material Prescribed textbook (Kane) No Deakin printed study guide No Deakin printed reader	***Announcements*** from the Unit Chair provided instructions on how to access the technology, and information about assignments.	One ***one hour lecture*** per week in cities of Melbourne and Geelong: storytelling about the life & times of political leader and application of theory of moral capital to life story
Online resources in DSO Basic study guide (38 pages) Unit outline Arts Student Manual & Assignment Preparation Guide Audio & video files Audio streamed lectures Links to Arts, Library, University & external websites	***Discussions*** about course content and administrative matters - mostly to clarify assignment requirements and for social discourse. Thoughts on topic spaces designed to extend basic study guide commentary.	***One hour tutorial*** classes across the semester in Melbourne and Geelong exploring in greater depth moral capital in relation to each political leader.
CDs **Disk 1**: in-house and live off air video materials (8); **Disk 2**: e-readings (61); audio materials (20), basic study guide (38 pages); **Disk 3**: live off air video materials (3)	***Frequently Asked Questions – FAQ*** re formal assessment ***Emails, mobile & voice mail*** to individual students for private communication.	***Office consultations***

Evaluation objectives and methods

The aim of the evaluation was to illuminate issues associated with students' use and value of the digital media and the accompanying online learning environment in relation to the aims of the unit. This involved surveying all students in the final week of semester, with the survey administered in the classroom for on-campus students and by post for off-campus students. Overall, 56 students responded to the survey out of the 98 enrolled (response rate 57%): 45 students out of 69 on-campus (65%); and 11 out of 29 students off-campus (38%). Student views on the unit were also elicited through open forum discussion in the final lecture and various forms of unsolicited electronic student feedback were considered. Student background information gathered through the end of semester survey is reported in Table 2.

Table 2: Student background information

Age	18-20 (38%); 21-25 (32%); 26-35 (23%); over 35 (7%)
Gender	Male (48%); Female (52%)
Mode of study	On-campus (80%); off-campus (20%)
Level of study	AIP298 (59%); AIP398 (38%); AIP498 (3%)

How did students' experience the learning environment?

Development of student learning capacities

The vision shaping the Political Leadership curriculum was to help develop students' understanding of political history and political systems, and nearly every student valued the unit learning experience in this critical respect. In fact, a remarkable 86% of students responded that they *highly valued* the unit. In relation to different capacities, 91% believed the unit developed their understanding of key theoretical elements of political leadership, 92% believed that they had developed approaches to understanding why political leadership succeeds and fails, with 88% of students believing that they had developed the ability to analyse what motivates political leaders, how they act as change agents in society, and why they fail. Moreover, 79% of students thought they had developed their ability to employ research skills effectively. These capacities were no doubt well developed through the formal assessment regime of the unit and well supported through the provision of a broad range of digital resources (see below). On the other hand, while only a small minority of students believed that they experienced little or no development of argumentative, oral, debating and cross cultural skills, more students saw their development in less extensive terms. This may have implications for the future design of on-campus tutorials, equivalent e-tutorials for off-campus students and any associated formative assessment tasks. It also highlights the fact that any particular unit in a major or entire program can only be expected to make a contribution to the development of such generic students attributes as they apply to learning about politics in an arts' degree. Realistically, students are in a much better position to form some overall appreciation of the development of such attributes after completing their course of study.

The appropriateness of the unit's flexible formal assessment tasks on the achievement of the unit's visions and aims in the eyes of the students, and its stimulus in eliciting student engagement with the digital resources and textbook, can be gleaned from the survey results: over 90% of students valued the assignments in helping them achieve the unit's learning objectives; 93% appreciated assignment choice; 84% believed assignment topics were appropriate and 91% thought the reading materials were helpful in preparing for the assignments. What remained more problematic was the provision of discussion spaces online in supporting the assignment work, with only 48% of students believing that this helped them in their assignments. This stands out as being an area that requires development.

The unit attracts a significant percentage of international students, and involves examining a broad range of political leaders from different cultural settings in order to build analytical skills in a cross cultural context (see above). With this in mind we believe that the evaluation flags an important area of for future research relating to student learning with digital media: online learning in cross cultural settings. Hofstede (1986) has developed a 2 dimensional model: Power distance against individualism; and Masculinity against Uncertainty; to help explain some of the elements of this sort of cross cultural research. The findings strongly suggest that further research is needed to understand how different cultural factors affect students' online learning. Building on previous work, Hofstede (1991) identified five cultural issues that influence learning behaviour in this sort of setting: **Power distance** can be defined as the extent to which less powerful members of institutions and organisations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally; **Collectivism versus individualism** where collectivism refers to when people are integrated into a strong group that provides security and protection, while individualism refers to the nuclear family structure and the expectation of individuals looking after themselves; **Masculinity and femininity** where in 'masculine' societies men are tough and concerned with success, whereas women are more modest, and interested in the quality family life compared with in 'feminine' societies, both men and women are equally concerned with the quality of life; **Avoidance of uncertainty** which is the extent to which people feel threatened by uncertain or unknown situations; and **Long term orientation** where just as the concept of deferred gratification has been referred to when describing the Protestant work ethic, so too a cultural commitment to hard work and education for long term benefit represents an important

characteristic of East Asian cultures. While this area awaits further research, the current evaluation makes it clear that if we ignore cultural factors, we will overlook an important area of variation in student learning experiences with digital media and online technologies of growing significance in a world of globalising e-learning, international virtual exchanges, cross cultural curriculum developments and expanding international student audiences.

Use and value of multimedia learning resources

With a project of this nature there was always a risk of failure, of student misunderstanding of the purposes of the digital media package and sense of how to learn with it. However, the various media resources have been well received by students. In fact, 80% of students reported that they appreciated having access to the basic study guide, readings and audio-visual resources on the CDs, while 73% acknowledged the value of the broader range of readings on the CDs than would have been possible through a printed reader alone. Of and in themselves, 93% and 91% of students, respectively, found the study guide and readings very useful/moderately useful. Students (80%) also appreciated the ability to access the e-readings both on the CD and online, if they were working in this environment. 81% and 79% of students, respectively, believed that the audio and video resources on the CDs provided them with unique perspectives on the political leaders considered. As one student observed early in the semester:

> The interview with [author of prescribed text] is certainly an interesting, intelligent discussion, seemingly a good introduction to the course. It reinforces the ideas discussed…and provides a number of ideas that students can further pursue for their essays. I think the audio interviews are a very good idea. They are a stimulating and convenient way of accessing course content, I would definitely recommend that you continue this approach. I was highly impressed by the depth of knowledge that your colleagues demonstrate in the interviews and video footage. It seems to me like a great idea to make use of their expertise in delivering course content. The video material is a good idea too. The variety of media, is a good thing for students. It's more effective and stimulating to learn via a number of channels. I think that the more extensive readings stored on the CD, in contrast to what is usually available in unit readers, is of greater benefit for students.

In relation to the use and value attributed to audio and video resources on different political leaders, results are summarised in Table 3. Usage and value were largely dependent on students' assignment choices on particular political leaders, although most segments were used and valued quite well.

Table 3: Use and value of digital audio-visual resources for political leaders

Political Leader	Used extensively/ routinely	Used minimally/ not at all	Very/moderately useful	Not useful/not used
Text author commentary	Audio (77%)	Audio (23%)	Audio (86%)	Audio (14%)
Lincoln	Audio (59%)	Audio (41%)	Audio (83%)	Audio (17%)
Churchill	Audio (66%)	Audio (34%)	Audio (80%)	Audio (20%)
	Video (57%)	Video (43%)	Video (75%)	Video (25%)
De Gaulle	Audio (53%)	Audio (47%)	Audio (70%)	Audio (30%)
Gandhi	Audio (64%)	Audio (36%)	Audio (75%)	Audio (25%)
	Video (52%)	Video (48%)	Video (68%)	Video (32%)
Mandela	Audio (54%)	Audio (46%)	Audio (72%)	Audio (28%)
	Video (52%)	Video (48%)	Video (66%)	Video (34%)
Suu Kyi	Audio (59%)	Audio (41%)	Audio (77%)	Audio (23%)
	Video (55%)	Video (45%)	Video (68%)	Video (32%)
Kuan Yu, Mahathir & Soeharto	Audio (43%)	Audio (57%)	Audio (62%)	Audio (38%)
Wahid	Video (36%)	Video (64%)	Video (48%)	Video (52%)
JFK to Clinton	Audio (48%)	Audio (52%)	Audio (70%)	Audio (30%)
Menzies to Howard	Audio (56%)	Audio (44%)	Audio (63%)	Audio (37%)
	Video (46%)	Video (54%)	Video (59%)	Video (41%)

Problematic nature of communicating online

There are many avenues to communicate with technologies and if anything this complicated the use of the online teaching and learning system for the unit. From mobile, voice mail and private email, to announcements, internal messaging and discussions within the online system, options abound. In the case

of the unit, results showed much less use and value attributed to the online environment compared to the use of the CD digital media, although the streamed lectures, delivered through the online environment, were see as helpful. Moreover, more of the communication between lecturer and students seemed to occur through other than those avenues provided within the University's online environment. There were complications with initial access of the online system which did not help student engagement with the online features of the unit. However, the results indicate that students will need perhaps even more incentives to learn online beyond the mere provision of learning resources and multiple discussion spaces.

Key issues

Understanding the incremental nature of the development

The Chair of the unit confronted the classical three pronged challenge in unit development: shaping a new subject curriculum based on University, faculty and major polices and principles; developing a set of digital resources and inducting students into their appropriate use; and designing a supportive online environment and inducting students into its effective use. The outcome is clearly contingent on a number of factors relating to teacher, students and learning context. The approach has been incrementally implemented with the acquisition and trialling of various resources and site features in DSO. The approach is also being extended and refined in two other unit developments being overseen by the Unit Chair in *Global Islamic Politics* and *Culture and Society in Contemporary Asia*. The philosophy is not one of definitely conceiving all elements of the approach from the beginning, but to progressively trial, evaluate and revise materials and the online environment in response to teacher and student interests and concerns, and the contributions of other learning support parties within and outside the University. The evaluation reported is a commitment to this task, augmented itself by unsolicited student emails, particularly from off-campus students, about their thoughts on aspects of the unit as *they went about studying it*. Thus, the electronic environment, as informal evaluative vehicle, can therefore contribute to the teacher's ability to improve a unit's effectiveness in timely, personal and responsive ways. We believe that incremental, responsive development of such environments demands a new type of experimental thinking and a new view of a scholarly commitment to continuous quality improvement. It also requires systems and processes that can handle large scale prototyping effort. Of overriding significance is that the new investments in corporate technologies must provide the capacities that allow for flexible, organic development of learning environments open to a broader range of stakeholder contributions and resource developments based on changing curriculum needs.

Re-orienting students' learning efforts towards exercising choice and self directness

The initial reaction of students conditioned to expect a standard amount of Deakin produced printed study guide and reader material is naturally to ask 'where is it?', if it's not there to be picked up and held in the hand. If what is there instead is a CD pack containing a richer variety of media resources, including a short electronically delivered basic study guide, then students can be left confused and out of their comfort zone. At least a CD pack gives students something tangible and concrete. If they have to rely solely on Web based material accessible only via a less than completely reliable network connection the students' anxiety is naturally compounded. Talk of 'virtuality' and 'virtual reality' sounds very exciting as an abstract concept but the first time experience of it in e-learning can be deeply disconcerting for some students. The range and amount of e-readings defines the expansive nature of the Political Leadership curriculum and the rationale for no printed Reader, with its more limited number of materials based on print production constraints, does require careful explanation to students at the beginning of semester. While it would be tempting to select a smaller number of readings which might be seen to be the very best on various topics and reproduce them in a small printed Reader this would be misconceived. Moreover, this type of priority selection is almost impossible to make in a unit of this nature and would be misleading of the breadth of required reading needed to satisfactorily undertake the unit's formal assessment.

So too does the need for serious engagement with the audio-visual material in lieu of the usually sizable printed study guide. As explained by the Unit Chair, an understanding of the phenomenon of contemporary political leadership requires students to engage actively and critically with broadcast media and the Internet. The provision of a substantial amount of audio-visual material was in part aimed at orientating students to the need to engage with the contemporary media in continuing their understanding

of political leadership during and beyond the study of the unit. In the case of the latter, the choice of assignment topic around breaking political leadership developments like this year's American presidential elections can only be reasonably researched through the use of the Internet and engagement with media broadcast sources. Students becoming comfortable with the choice and self directness required in the unit is illustrated as follows: 'Most other courses are quite directed in the material presented, but this has allowed me to find my own information and digest and analyse things for myself, whilst still having a starting point from which to build'.

Rethinking the role, nature and functions of the study guide

In traditional distance education the study guide was designed to fulfil a number of educational functions and, as suggested, was overwhelmingly presented in a printed form, and where possible wrapping around a commercial prescribed textbook(s). These functions ranged from gaining students' attention, declaring learning outcomes, presenting, explaining and elaborating subject matter, providing learning activities, and feedback on performance. With the advent of digital media, there are opportunities to distribute these functions across more than one medium and across more than one digital place/space. While only creating a basic text study guide, the Unit Chair established a 'Thoughts about the Topic' discussion space in DSO for each week/topic/political leader. This space allowed the Chair to extend his study guide commentary in response to students' learning concerns relating to the topic dealt with in that week. It also allowed students both on- and off-campus to share their thoughts about the learning of the topic during the week of its teaching. To a certain extent the usefulness of this aspect depends on the particular style of the teacher. In 'selling' online teaching to academic staff it is good to be mindful of this element of personal style and to recognise that different approaches will suit some teachers more than others.

The audio-visual materials were selected and recorded to capture students' attention and interest in the various political leaders dealt with in the unit. The capturing and audio streaming of lectures once the exclusive preserve of on-campus students who could make the particular lecture at a particular time are now available to all students, and can be seen more centrally as another key dimension of the overall guide to the unit's study drawing on and in other key learning resources and connecting out to online communications spaces between classroom teaching accessible by all students. The streamed lectures also provided connections between topics and political leaders, and current political developments, a useful addition to the basic study guide commentary. The basic approach taken with the lectures was that they should be used as a vehicle for story telling as a means of conveying the subject matter; with the telling of the stories of the lives and times of the political leaders covered in the unit done in ways complementary to the more analytical treatments in the audio interviews produced on the CD and in DSO. McDrury and Alterio (2003) observe that:

> Storytelling is a uniquely human experience that enables us to convey, through the language of words, aspects of ourselves and others, and the worlds, real or imagined, that we inhabit. Stories enable us to come to know these worlds and our place in them given that we are all, to some degree, constituted by stories: stories about ourselves, our families, friends and colleagues, our communities, our culture, our place in history. (p.31)

Shortening the lead time in delivering resources to students

After completion of all required recordings and digitisation of the e-readings, the CD pack was compiled quickly using a simple Web interface to access the various resources. It was important though to organise these resources by topic as part of the CD design. Deakin pays a licence fee to record live off air and to use this material in any way deemed appropriate in digital form – whole or edited part(s). In order to speed up the production process, documentaries recorded in this fashion were used in full without edit. The material was deemed of sufficiently high quality to justify this with the cost of manufacture of an additional CD being much less than the time that would have been involved in the fine grained academic and production editing of such material. This may not, however, always be the most appropriate design decision in all circumstances where portions of such programs might be better used for very specific educational purposes. After the two CD pack was manufactured additional quality documentary material became available which was produced and sent out to students on a third CD during the semester. The idea was to not sit on good material until the unit was offered again a year later. There are, however, significant systems issues for the University involved in capturing, editing and distributing this type of media resource quickly to students on scale, which have been further highlighted by the development of

the unit. There are strong arguments to record automatically a much larger amount and range of documentary and current affairs' material from free to air and cable television and radio, suitably archive it and then make it available to teaching staff to use through various digital formats directly in a very timely fashion. This is coupled with a growing desire for teaching staff to be able to create their own audio and video digital recordings for various instructional purposes again just in time, e.g. audio supplemented feedback on assignments. This grassroots move to digital empowerment where local media are developed by teaching staff for their students' benefit on the fly can circumvent centrally determined media production standards, and those in central support groups who are the professionally trained media development specialists. However, with so few professional media producers centrally located, the move to local productions fit for their intended purpose seems inevitable. The issue is not one of central media production professionals versus the efforts of amateur teachers, but the need to recognise and help facilitate such forms of digital media development in ways that are technically sound and educationally beneficial. In part, the success of moves towards educational digital media use on a large scale will be dependent on implementing a hybrid approach where appropriate media elements are developed through both central and local approaches working together. This requires a research and development program orchestrated at the centre to consider technical standards and educational guidelines in developing different types of digital media for different purposes in a range of disciplines. Moreover, it is easy to speak of the digital and online in one and the same breath. Both in terms of creation/distribution and use, CD, or, indeed, DVD is still a superior platform for multiple media, specifically longer, documentary style programs compared to online systems for on-campus, intranet and off-campus Internet learners. Pushing all such material only and wholly online can undermine its use and value for students. Moreover, it can compromise the distinctive value of online technologies for their more powerful communicative potentials.

Balancing and integrating formal assessment

The formal assessment requirements of the unit require two essays on at least two different political leaders and an examination which requires consideration of at another three different political leaders in the unit. Overall, at least 5 of 13 topics must be studied in depth or about half the political leaders dealt with in the unit examined at length. The formal assessment attempts to achieve some reasonable balance between depth and breadth of coverage, erring on the side of opportunity for in-depth study of the application of the theory of moral capital to a limited but still diverse set of leaders. This seemed to be appreciated by students as confirmed by student comments such as: 'Thanks a lot for that. I liked that second essay much better, I found that Gandhi was a very interesting character, and therefore didn't mind reading more resources and actually studying him in greater depth. Thanks for the advice on the essay'.

As reported above, although the online environment, as it was established to support discussion on assignments, was not as fully utilised as it might have been, and while the digital learning experience was strong, the online experience was muted, at least in the form of collaborative endeavours within the online system. We acknowledge that this might require stronger connection between online collaboration and formal assessment requirements, including such things like submission of assignment proposals for online comment by lecturer and fellow students, or even online group work for off-campus students. Moreover, it would seem to certainly require a very active moderating role to be played by the lecturer. While acknowledging these possibilities, we would wish to reinforce the key message with digital and online developments that it is difficult for any particular teaching staff member to avail themselves of all the possibilities with other pressing job responsibilities. Therefore, priorities need to be pursued in relation to the best options for enhancing students' learning.

Provoking critical thought amongst colleagues

The new unit 'Political Leadership' is a product of its context and the intentions and personal style of the Unit Chair and development team. The unit's exposure to other parties around the University has already stimulated constructive debate about the role and functions of a study guide, about the desired balance of various media components, and about the role of classroom teaching and the role and value of the printed medium in the educational enterprise. It is not an approach to be adopted unthinkingly by all, as it may not necessarily suit their own subjects and students. All in all, though, it has already proved a useful stimulus to consider carefully these types of issues in other development contexts and to circumvent rote, mechanical responses in a period of change requiring fresh thinking and action.

Conclusion

Increasingly the authors are observing that more creative approaches to the digital and online agenda are being shaped as much by curriculum interests as they are by the apparent benefits of the technologies of themselves. Often, powerful curriculum perspectives are formulated through active research interests in the discipline. With a student learning focus firmly in mind, it is recognised that a powerful synergistic meeting of alignments amongst curriculum, pedagogy, assessment and media/technology mix lead to valued learning outcomes. Each dimension, indeed, each component within these alignments, may of and in itself appear to be of no momentous and novel value. However, an integrative view of all dimensions, components and elements can lead to new and valuable developments in the way learning environments are conceived and enacted. The scholarly role of the academic in this process of innovation is critical. We ignore this at our peril.

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Dale Holt & Siew Mee Barton, Teaching and Learning Support Unit, Learning Services, Deakin University
Greg Barton, School of Social and International Studies, Faculty of Arts, Deakin University

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